DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 511 CS 507 492

AUTHOR Spicer, Holt V.
TITLE Back to the Future.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association (Tampa, FL, April 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advocacy; *Course Content; Debate; Educational History; Higher Education; *Inquiry; *Persuasive Discourse; Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Argumentation Theory; Universal Audience

ABSTRACT

"Argumentation" as an academic course should not be limited to or regarded as primarily a study of advocacy. Most of the current texts in the field of argumentation are directed toward skill in oral advocacy or persuasion. This emphasis works to the disadvantage of the student. Students should be able to use the principles learned in argumentation classes to ascertain the closest approximation of "truth" that can be discovered, to advocate effectively and ethically the truth as perceived and to defend themselves against the arguments of others. Thus argumentation should be defined as the study of the canons of discovery of issues and the criticism of reasoning and evidence used to support claims. Examples from textbooks of the 40s, 50s, and 60s indicate that inquiry and discussion were regarded as tools for considering all possible solutions to a problem, and debate or persuasion were reserved for advocating or testing the preferred solution. Since the early 60s authors of texts in argumentation and debate have recognized that discussion is a part of the study of critical decision making and argumentation but have chosen not to devote serious attention to it. Inquiry, often in the form of discussion, and advocacy, often in the form of debate, should both be a part of any class in argumentation. (Seventeen references are attached.) (PRA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Holt V. Spicer

Back to the Future

I contend that "argumentation" as an academic course should not be limited to or regarded as primarily a study of advocacy. I will argue that most of the current texts in the field of argumentation are directed toward skill in oral advocacy or persuasion and that this emphasis works to the disadvantage of the student.

Certainly one may legitimately define argumentation as equivalent to persuasion or rhetoric with the support of no lesser authorities than Richard Whately and Chaim Perelman. With Stephen Toulmin we may recognize that arguments are both field-dependent and audience dependent if we study argument in a social context. This may be the proper context for the term "argumentation" in our journals and convention papers. However, argumentation may just as well emphasize Perelman's concept of the "universal audience" and Toulmin's notion of the field-invariant aspects of argument for pedagogical purposes.

I feel that we would do a greater service to our students (and perhaps to society) if we returned to the views of an earlier period and taught argumentation as a common core of precepts to be used in "inquiry," "criticism," and "advocacy." Students should be able to use the principles learned in argumentation classes to ascertain the closest approximation of "truth" that one can discover, to advocate effectively and ethically the truth as perceived and to defend themselves against the arguments of others. This view of the academic study of argumentation might be better served if we define argumentation as the *study of the canons of discovery of issues and the criticism of reasoning and evidence used to support claims.*

ED333511

CS507492

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Holt V. Spicer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

What are the "canons of criticism" of reasoning, evidence, and discovery? They are the sum total of the advice on those subjects given from Protagoras to the present that inform us of criteria and choices available. These "canons" are consistent with what Rowland (1989) has described as the informal logic movement. This movement, he says:

> "is built around five basic assumptions. First, formal logic is not a useful means for describing or evaluating real-world argument. . . . Second, standards of informal logic can be developed to test the substantive strength of argument. These standards consist largely of general tests of evidence and a reformed theory of fallacies. Through the application of these criteria, it is believed that strong and weak arguments can be distinguished from each other, not just in terms of their form, but also in terms of their substance. . . . Third, positions supported by strong arguments are more likely to be true (valuable, effective) than those supported by weak arguments . . . . Fourth, the principles of informal logic lie at the core of a liberal education and should be taught to all students in order to facilitate democratic decision-making. . . . Fifth, while expertise is relevant to technical decisions in particular fields, the standards of informal logic are generalizable to all non-technical issues (they also have application to technical questions but not sufficient on such issues). In other words, the focus of the informal logic movement is on training citizens to become generalists, who can apply their skill to any question. . . . (p. 207)

I would argue that the skill that the generalist should bring to any question would involve the application of the canons of criticism of reasoning

and evidence used to advance claims and discover issues in cases of inquiry, advocacy and intellectual self-defense. Although Rowland's identification of the basic assumptions of informal logic have been formulated recently, they are similar to ideas taught in classes "argumentation" or "debate" or "discussion" in the decades of the 40's, 50's, and 60's.

In 1941, when Henry Lee Ewbank and J. Jeffery Auer introduced their important book Discussion and Debate: Tools of Democracy, democracy and the scientific method were thought to be the key to the future of our society. They asserted that although "the scientific method cannot be applied, *in toto*, in the solution of public problems. . . . it is the discussion and debate technique based on scientific procedures which should be applied to the democratic process of social inquiry and judgment." (p. 19-20) After crediting John Dewey (1938) with providing them with the basis of their system, Ewbank and Auer state:

> It is along this continuum of inquiry and judgment, or investigation and decision, that that discussion and debate is ranged. Specifically, the discussion and debate technique follows five logical steps of reflective thinking which incorporate the essentials of the scientific method:
>
> (1) locating and defining the problem;
>
> (2) exploring the problem;
>
> (3) examining suggested solutions;
>
> (4) choosing the best solution;
>
> (5) securing acceptance of the selected solution. (p. 20)

In 1945 Braden and Brandenburg, in a text with a noteworthy title, Oral Decision-Making: Principles of Discussion and Debate, clarified for their time three interrelated terms.

> Discussion is the oral process of inquiry. Through oral interchange and group reflection persons investigate and examine controversial subjects. . . . Debate is the oral process of advocacy. The advocates argue for or against the proposition. . . . One step beyond debate is persuasive speaking, which presents only one side of the proposition. . . . The persuasive speaker . . . may base his appeal exclusively upon motives or may combine emotional appeals with argument and evidence in attempting to accomplish . . . [his] goals. (pp. 9-10)

By the 1960's the similarities and differences between inquiry and advocacy tended to be recognized by most authorities.

> [The] prevailing view came to be that argumentation (or debate) and discussion were complementary processes whose differences could be visualized on several continua. On the inquiry-advocacy continuum, the reflective thinking-intentional reasoning continuum, and the cooperation-competition continuum, discussion would be placed nearer the first term in each pair, and debate would be placed nearer the second. These differences in degree and kind were not intended to express a preference for either discussion or debate. (Mills 1966, pp. 6-7)

Further, during the 1960's , the term "argumentation" began to be elevated to reign over the sub-disciplines of discussion and debate. As Mills stated, "It is a mistake to treat argumentation and debate as synonyms, because the former is the theoretical field or the body of principles, while the latter is a specialized application of the former" (p. 7). Or, as James H. Mc Bath (1963) put it in his Argumentation and Debate: Principles and Practices, "Argumentation, as a strategy of inquiry, has its inception in a

problem, proceeds to investigation and discussion, and culminates in systematic probing of hypotheses in the format of debate" (p. 12).

During the last part of the decade of the sixties the focus of group discussion began to shift from problem-solving by the use of Dewey's steps of reflective thought, with its stress on *how* problems should be solved to an examination of how groups *do* engage in problem solving. Psychologists and social psychologists had been interested in description of group behavior from early on but speech and educational professionals became interested in descriptive analysis and qualitative research much later. (Harnack, 1968) Although texts in speech or communication dealing with group decision-making began to shift their focus to group interaction and away from decision-making, some authors continued to emphasize Dewey's steps of reflective thought and devoted a great deal of attention to the study of reasoning and evidence for use of groups engaged in inquiry. For example, in his Discussion, Conference, and Group Process, Halbert E. Gulley applied Stephen Toulmin's (1958) model of argument to the field of inquiry in 1960, before it was popularized in textbooks in argumentation. Gulley's work and others which followed Dewey and his pattern of reflective thought and emphasized the use of reasoning and evidence in decision-making continued to be popular into the next decade.

Two years after the publication of Gulley's text on discussion, a landmark work in argumentation which also relied heavily on Toulmin's Uses of Argument (1958) appeared. This was Decision by Debate by Ehninger and Brockriede. (1963) In introducing their rationale for viewing debate in a new context they make the distinction between two methods for making decisions critically. They stated:

> When two or more individuals attempt to arrive at a joint decision critically, through a careful study of the pertinent evidence and values, they may regard themselves as a closed group and be content with a decision that satisfies *them*. Or they may regard themselves as part of a larger group and desire that a decision be made by others, by a wider audience, a " public." The one employs methods which we shall call "internal"; the other, "external." (p. 7)

They go on to identify "dialectic" and "discussion" as the two methods of internal decision-making and "debate" as the critical form of external decision-making. The authors then state:

> Discussion is a valuable instrument for making collective choices and decisions. Everyone should understand its forms and develop appropriate skill in their use. But the study of discussion is an extensive subject in its own right, and one upon which we cannot enter." (p. 9)

They then go on to present the new and controversial positions that "(a) *the end and method of debate are critical;* (b) *debate is an instrument of investigation rather than of propagation,* (c) *debate is a co-operative rather than a competitive enterprise."* (16) and include sample debates in the appendix..

Austin Freeley, in his Argumentation and Debate: Rational Decision Making (1966) also recognized discussion as a means of decision-making and a part of argumentation but not appropriate for his book. He expressed a more traditional view of debate as advocacy, made academic debate his focal point and included a sample intercollegiate debate in an appendix. The point I wish to make with examples from Ehninger and Brockriede and

Freeley is that since the early sixties authors of texts in argumentation and debate have recognized that discussion is a part of the study of critical decision making and argumentation but have chosen not to devote any serious attention to it. Freeley's text is still popular and most texts in argumentation have tended to follow his treatment of the field and have equated argumentation and debate and have placed a strong emphasis on examples of intercollegiate debate.

Recently, there has been a shift regarding argumentation and "advocacy" as synonymous terms and urging that the field can best be studied through the example of academic or intercollegiate debate. Lee and Lee (1989) in the text Arguing Persuasively treat argumentation as just one aspect of persuasion and although they emphasize that the arguments used must be "reasonable" and "justifiable," in the final analysis it is the specific audience which determines what arguments and emotional appeals are reasonable and justifiable. What they say is true if we accept their definitions of argumentation and persuasion and theirs is one acceptable point of view. However, in an argumentation class perhaps the students should be taught to address Perelman's "universal audience" rather than his "particular audience."

"The universal audience is composed of all reasonable and competent people; a particular audience is any group of people whether or not they are competent" (Foss, Foss and Trapp, 1985, p. 108). The universal audience is a frame of reference against which a speaker or an audience can judge what constitutes "good" or "bad" arguments. In the argumentation class the student should be encouraged to create and evaluate the use of reasoning

and evidence as if he or she were a member of Perelman s universal audience.

Rybacki and Rybacki in the text Advocacy and Opposition treat argumentation as "the rational sub-set of persuasion" (1991, p.) and, as the title implies, would lead the student to believe that argumentation is limited only to persuasion in one direction or another. What about argumentation that involves internal decision-making or discussion? What is to prevent us from teaching our students to learn about the proper use of reasoning, evidence, and the location of issues in any particular case by teaching them Dewey's steps of reflective thought and have them engage in discussion? Internal decision-making is as important in the real world as is advocacy. In argumentation classes we should teach the application of the principles of argumentation in inquiry for internal, external and personal decision-making.

There is one book in the field with a title which suggests that it is an exception to the "advocacy only" trend: Argumentation: Inquiry and Advocacy by Ziegelmueller, Kay and Dause (1990). The text states clearly that both inquiry and advocacy are legitimate parts of the field of argumentation. As they put it:

> Argumentation thus involves both inquiry -- discovering appropriate beliefs and actions -- and advocacy -- using language strategies to justify our beliefs and actions to others. In the inquiry stage we are guided by such tools as analysis, the discovery and testing of evidence and premises, the tests of argument, and the principles of organization. In the advocacy stage we are guided by an understanding of the fields, forums and formats for advocacy, the

strategies for argument, refutation, cross-examination, and presentational skills. (p. 9)

This view is less limiting than the advocacy only view but flawed nonetheless because if inquiry is regarded only as a stage in the process of advocacy one may very well have the solution in mind before engaging in inquiry. This is clearly implied by the discussion in the text of propositions to be defended and opposed and the absence of *questions* to be *investigated* by open-minded inquiry. Students should be given the opportunity to investigate problems with an open mind rather than to seek evidence and arguments to support or oppose a proposition. This is a distinction that was common in an earlier period when inquiry and discussion were regarded as tools for considering all possible solutions to a problem and debate or persuasion were reserved for advocating or testing the preferred solution.

If students are allowed to participate in or to witness discussion and debate in a classroom atmosphere they should be better able to defend themselves against the constant barrage of persuasion to which they are exposed each day. But, you may ask, was not discussion and the steps of reflective thought rejected by our discipline as being unrealistic? No. They were found not to represent the way in which small groups solved problems as we studied the real world. They are still recommended as methods of problem solving in texts on small group communication and public speaking and have been ignored rather than ruled out by writers of argumentation texts. Certainly, they are no more unrealistic than intercollegiate debating and the texts of such debates included in the appendices of current books in the field.

I firmly believe that inquiry, often in the form of discussion, and advocacy, often in the form of debate, should both be a part of any class in argumentation. Let me turn for the benediction to Archbishop Whately who stated: . . .Reasoning may be considered as applicable to two purposes. . . the *ascertainment* of the truth by investigation (inquiry) and the *establishment* of it to the satisfaction of *another* (proof) . . . The process of *investigation* must be supposed completed, and certain conclusions arrived at by that process, before the advocate undertakes to *prove* the justness of those conclusions (Whately, 1846, p 5-6 as quoted in Mc Burney, O'Neil and Mills, 1955, p. 7).

References

Braden, W. B., & Brandenburg, E. (1945). Oral decision-making: Principles of discussion and debate. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Dewey, J. (1938). Logic: the theory of inquiry. New York: Henry Holt.

Ehninger, D. & Brockriede, W. (1963) Decision by debate. New York: Dodd, Mead.

Ewbank, H. L., & Auer, J. J. (1941). Discussion and debate: Tools of democracy. New York: F. S. Crofts.

Foss, S. K., Foss, K. A., & Trapp, R. (1985). Contemporary perspectives on rhetoric. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Freeley, A. (1966). Argumentation and debate: Rational decision making. (2nd ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Gulley, H. E. (1960). Discussion, conference, and group process. New York: Henry Holt.

Harnack, R. V. John Dewey and discussion. Western Speech, 32, 137-149

Lee, K. & Lee, R. (1989). Arguing persuasively. New York: Longman.

McBath, J. H. (Ed.) (1967). Argumentation and debate: Principles and practices. (rev. ed.). New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

McBurney, J. H., O'Neil, J. M., & Mills, G. E. (1955). (2nd ed.) Argumentation and debate. New York: Macmillan.

Mills, G. E. (1966). Reason in controversy: An introduction to general argumentation. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Rowland, R. C. (1989). The value of the rational world and narrative paradigms. Central States Speech Journal, 39, 207.

Rybacki, K. C. & Rybacki, D. J. (1991). Advocacy and opposition: An introduction to argumentation. (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Toulmin, S. E. (1958). Uses of argument. Cambridge, England: University Press.

Whately, R. (1862). Elements of rhetoric. Boston: James Munroe.

Ziegelmueller, G. W., Kay, J., & Dause, C. A. Argumentation: Inquiry and advocacy. (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.